The Saints of the Roman Canon

The List we have today is ancient. Nevertheless it does seem to have undergone some development. This is clear when some early manuscripts are examined; some of the Saints in the presently list are missing. The original list must have comprised those saints who enjoyed a special veneration in Rome at the time of the introduction of the *communicantes*.

The Apostles all enjoyed special veneration there. The full lis tof the Apostles entered the canon sometime after the 5th Century. Yet this list is an intriguing one in that it shows a good bit of dissimilarity to biblical and extra biblical lists of the Apostles. Perhaps it is closest to that in Matthew (10:2-4) but is also a good bit different insofar as order is concerned.

The addition of Paul is understood but the order is what is more peculiar. It seems that the list developed gradually. This means that not all twelve apostles were mentioned at first but that the list was gradually filled out. In particular the veneration of certain of the apostles was attested to in early Rome: Peter, Paul, Thomas James, Philip and James the greater, John and Andrew. However, evidence for any special veneration of the other Apostles is lacking and so it appears that there names were added only later by way of filling out the list. This explains the unusual order; the list grew gradually over time.

In particular, the Apostles **Peter and Paul** were venerated as their graves were in the City of Rome and already boasted beautiful Churches upon the sites thereof.

Linus - the second Pope. He succeeded St. Peter in 67 AD. According to Irenaeus he is the Linus Mentioned by St. Paul in 2 Timothy 4:21 and that he was consecrated a bishop by St. Paul. He may have been buried near Peter.

Cletus - The third Pope and a convert of St. Peter. He became Pope in 76 AD and was martyred in the persecution of Diocletianin about 91 AD. He too seems to have been buried near St. Peter.

Clement - St. Paul mentions Clement in Philippians 4:3 as his "Fellow Laborer." Tradition says that he too was baptized by St. Peter. He succeeded Cletus as Pope in 91 AD and was exiled to Crimea by the Emperor Trajan. He labored so arduously in preaching the Gospel to his fellow prisoners that he was condemned to death and killed by being thrown into the sea with an anchor around his neck. He is the author of a well known letter to the Corinthian Church wherein he rebukes some for a schism that has broken out. It is an important historical document for it shows very early on the authoritative intervention of a Roman Pope in the affairs of another apostolic church. He died in 99 AD.

Xystus (later spelled Sixtus) - Elected Pope in 257 AD. Little is known of the specifics of his pontificate although some correspondence does exist. He was arrested while saying Mass during the Emperor Valerian's persecution. He was killed shortly thereafter with six deacons.

Cornelius - a roman priest who was elected Pope to succeed Fabian. This Pontificate was noted especially for the problem of how to deal with Christians who had apostatized during recent persecutions and now wished to be readmitted to the faith. Cornelius sided with Cyprian (below). Both steered a middle course in a debate that saw opposition between the lax who wished merely to readmit them without much penance and the rigorists who held that the Church could not forgive this sin. Cornelius required penance for this sin but clearly upheld the Church's power to forgive this sin by the mandate of Christ. Things got pretty bad when Novatian a rigorist, declared himself pope against Cornelius. Eventually a synod of Western Bishops met and upheld Cornelius as rightful Pope, condemning Novatian. The persecutions against the Christians started up again in 253 and Cornelius was exiled to Civita Vecchia where he died of hardships he was forced to endure.

Cyprian was Bishop of Carthage. Had corresponded with Cornelius and was linked with him in this regard. He was one of the great figures of the Third Century. He was martyred in 258 and shares the feast day with Cornelius.

Lawrence - One of the seven deacons of Rome and the deacon of Pope Sixtus. He was overwhelmed with grief when Sixtus was martyred during the persecutions of Valerian but took solace in Sixtus' prediction that he would follow him soon. He sold many of the Church's possessions and gave to the poor. When the Roman prefect found this out he was angry and demanded the treasure be given to the emperor. Lawrence said he would need three days to round up the money. At the end of the three days Lawrence brought before the prefect many poor, the lame orphans and other unfortunates and declared that they were the Church's treasures. The furious prefect struck a fire under a griddle and bound Lawrence upon it. According to tradition Lawrence indicated to the executioner that he could be turned over now since he was broiled enough on the one side. His martyrdom took place in 258. It is said that his death signaled the end of paganism in the city. There is little doubt that his death inspired great devotion in the city and may well have laid the groundwork for the favorable attitude of Constantine less than a century later. "As Jerusalem is made glorious by Stephen so Rome is made illustrious by Lawrence."[1]

Chrysogonus -Little is known of this saint except that he was widely venerated in Rome as monuments to his honor attest. He was a non-Roman and seems to be tied closely with St. Anastasia. He was beheaded about 304 at Aqua Via. A church in Rome stands in his honor.

John and Paul - These brother-saints may have been officers in the household of Constantia, daughter of Constantine the Great, who were martyred under Julian the Apostate, 361-363. Presumably they were executed for denouncing Julian's Apostasy. But if this is true, the presence of their relics in Rome would be hard to explain since, under Julian there were no martyrdoms recorded in the West or at Rome. Could one claim an exception? When entered in the canon they were considered as Roman Martyrs. There is a Church in Rome built over the remains of their home.

Cosmas and Damian - twin brothers born in Arabia. They studied medicine in Syria and then lived at Aegeae, Cilicia and became widely known for their medical skills which they offered without charge to all. As professing Christians they were arrested during a period

of persecutions and tried before Lysias the Governor of Cilicia. They were tortured and then beheaded for the faith. Three other brothers died with them. Many miracles were reported after their death and after St. Luke, they are patrons of Physicians.

Second Choir

The saints. Here we have seven men and seven women. So again, there are two choirs arrayed before us if you will under the headship of **John (The Baptist)** - clearly the knowledge of him is great given his important role in the scriptures as the precursor of Christ. The son of Zachary and Elizabeth, he lived in the desert of Judea until about AD 27. He then began to preach on the banks of the Jordan river calling for repentance and declaring that the Kingdom of God was at hand. When the Lord Jesus came forth he declared: "There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He was later beheaded by Herod at the request of Salome the daughter of Herodias. He is one of the few saints to have more than one feast in his honor: June 24 - his birth, August 29 - his beheading.

Stephen - the first Martyr of the Christian era. He was a learned Greek speaking Jew who was living in Jerusalem. He was one of the seven men selected by the Apostles to the order of deacon in order to care for the Hellenic Jewish community. He was an eloquent preacher. He was accused of blasphemy by the leaders of the synagogues and was stoned to death. This story is related in Acts 6-7. His feast is Dec. 26.

Matthias - was selected by the Apostles to replace Judas in the college of the apostles (Acts 1:21-26). Tradition places him as preaching in Judea, Capadocia and the shores of the Caspian Sea. He suffered martyrdom at Colchis. His feast is May 14.

Barnabas - He was a Jew born in Cyprus and known as Joseph. He sold his property and gave the proceeds to the Apostles who named him Barnabas. He lived in community with the early Church. It was he who persuaded the apostles to accept Paul as a disciple. He was sent to Antioch in Syria to look into the Community there. He accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey and also attended the First Council in Jerusalem where he spoke of the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles. Later, he preached in Alexandria and Rome and founded the Church in Cyprus. He was stoned to death at Salamis about AD 61. His feast is June 11.

Ignatius - probably a convert to Christianity and a disciple of John the Apostle. He was appoint Bishop of Antioch by St. Peter and was the bishop there some 40 years. He was arrested during the persecution of Trajan and sent to Rome. On his way he authored seven letters which are of important historical and spiritual significance. Some of the following topics were covered therein: the Church, marriage, the Trinity, the incarnation, Redemption, and the Eucharist. He also discussed in rather vivid and ghoulish terms his approaching martyrdom and indicated his joy to die for Christ. He was martyred about AD 107. His feast day is October 17.

Alexander - There are several of this name who could be referred to here. But the probable individual referred to is St Alexander of the Via Salaria. It is believed that he was martyred in 113 AD along with two other priests in Rome. Although He is called Pope Alexander in some martyrologies this is considered an erroneous title applied to him by those who later confused him with later popes of the name.

Marcellinus and Peter - Marcellinus was a priest and Peter an exorcist both of who were arrested during the persecution of Diocletian. In prison they made many converts including the jailer. Later they were sentenced to death and beheaded in AD 304. Constantine built a Church in their honor. Their feast is June 2.

Felicity and Perpetua - Perpetua was an African Woman (from Carthage) of noble birth who was arrested along with Felicity and several other fellow Catechumens. All were baptized while they were in prison. Felicity gave birth to a daughter as well. They were all eventually sentenced to death to be carried out in the public games in Rome. The wild beasts would not approach Perpetua and Felicity and so the were killed by the sword. The account of their heroic death was very moving and achieved such popularity that St. Augustine would later complain that the account was often read along with Scripture at Holy Mass. They were martyred in the 3rd Century and feast is March 7.

Agatha - She was born of a wealthy family in Sicily who became a Christian and dedicated her life to virginity. Hence she refused the advances of a consul by the name of Quintian who in turn declared her to be a Christian during one of the persecutions. She was thus arrested and subjected to all kinds of tortures and indignities. She was placed in a house of prostitution but even there was able to retain her virginity. She was placed on the rack, her breasts were cut off and she was burned to death. Her feast is Feb 5.

Lucy - She too was of noble birth and when she refused to enter into a marriage arranged for her she was denounced as a Christian by the man. When she was sentenced to a brothel the guards were physically unable to move her there. So, she was ordered to be burned to death but the flames did not harm her. Finally she was stabbed through the throat in 304. She is the patron of those with eye trouble possibly because her name Lucia means light or possibly because of the tradition that her eyes were torn out by her judge but were later miraculously restored. Her feast is Dec 13.

Agnes - She too was of noble birth but consecrated her life to virginity and was denounced for it by unsuccessful suitors. Again sentenced to a brothel she was able to keep her virginity even there. She was finally beheaded in 304. Her feast is January 21.

Cecilia - of a wealthy family in Rome she was married against her will to a man named Valerian. She convinced him to respect her virginity and he became a Christian along with his brother who Cecilia also brought to the faith. All of them devoted themselves to charitable works and were arrested for burying the bodies of Christian martyrs. Cecilia's sentence was to be suffocated to death but it was miraculously prevented. So she was ordered beheaded but the henchman botched the job and she lay dying for three days. She was buried in the Catacombs in the 4th Century. Her feast is November 22.

Anastasia - she was the daughter of a Roman noble and gave care to the Christians suffering under the persecution of Diocletian. She too was later arrested and burned to death for her Christian Faith about 304. Her feast is Dec. 25

and all the saints - again we are conscious that this is not a taxative list. We do not mean to exclude any saint but time limits us from mentioning them all!

1John stands at the head of the two Choirs. He closes the Old Testament and opens the New.